

Section Two

Introducing Literacy: Serving Preschoolers and their Families

Literacy notes for libraries serving preschoolers

The debate about the best ways to teach reading once children are in school continues, but most researchers now agree that reading skill, like so many other things, begins in infancy with parents and primary caregivers. Early exposure to language and print in context and in relationship seems crucial. First, children need experiences that develop their language capacity. Second, they need to be read to and exposed to print so they can begin to learn what text is for, how it works, and why it matters. Libraries can play a major role in both.

In order for emergent literacy skills to develop, children need to explore language that is sung, spoken, recited and written. It is available, knowledgeable, and willing adults who provide babies and toddlers with the experiences that encourage emergent literacy...Library-based family literacy programs designed for the very young can have a powerful two-fold effect. First, children fall in love with books and with libraries as the source of books. Second, because young children cannot get to the library by themselves ...adults who might never visit a library on their own come because it is fun for the children - and wily librarians find ways to captivate them, too.

Jennifer Birckmayer, Department of Human Development Cornell University, In Zero to Three, December 2000/January 2001, page 26.

Reading is first of all a language function. It involves the sounds of language, the structure of language, and the meaning of language. If language is not sufficiently developed, reading will be non-sense to a child. Most beginning reading instruction relies on showing children how words they know look in print and how sentences they understand are written or printed. Children who have been read to have a head start in this process. They usually have larger vocabularies and a better sense of how the English language fits together. There was a study of vocabulary that concluded that children's books have richer, more complex vocabulary than prime time television. Books that extend the vocabulary a child already has categories for, for example, books that include many kinds of vegetables or animals or weather, seem to be useful to expand vocabulary. Although we tell children that what they see on a page is "talking written down," the patterns of spoken and written language are often quite different. Children who have been read to also have a head start in knowing how the patterns of written language sound and work. Simple familiarity with the language of books is a large literacy advantage that begins early and extends well into the school years.

Unless a child has an adequate sense of the sounds of language and how they fit together, the child probably cannot benefit from phonics instruction, and spelling will make very little sense. Researchers call the awareness of sounds and how they go together phonemic awareness or phonological awareness. It is one of the newer subjects in the reading debates, and poor phonological awareness may help explain why some children have trouble when they try to "sound out" words.

In addition, some theorists hold that the most decisive factor in how well and how quickly a child learns to read is what the child already knows about books and how print works before the child enters school. When children watch as an adult reads, they learn many things. They learn that books always open the same way and that the print goes left to right. They learn

that the words are in the letters, not the pictures. They learn that the marks called letters are always the same, but the words and story are different in each book. They learn print is stable; that is, the words are different from book to book but the same in any given book each time it is read. They may learn to recognize certain constellations of letters as words. They begin to discriminate between letter shapes and names. When children watch the adults in their lives use writing and reading every day, the children learn that writing and reading are useful and important. Young children naturally want to imitate the adults who matter to them, and when their adults read and write, children want to read and write, too. And most of all, children who are read to and witness reading and writing learn that literacy is a good thing, a pleasant thing, and an important thing.

Dr Susan B. Neuman of the University of Michigan asserts:

Public libraries are well positioned to expose children to great quantities of print and meaningful language opportunities during the crucial preschool and elementary school years. Research shows that children need exposure to a wide variety of high-quality books of various topics, genres, and perspectives in order to acquire literacy skills. They also need books that reflect the diverse and multicultural nature of our society – books in which they can see themselves and others like them. (*The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development*, page 10.)

So – how can the library collection and library programming help our youngest patrons begin the journey toward literacy?

The Collection

The crucial, primary thing libraries can do for the future literacy of infants and young children is to make books available to them and encourage the adults in their lives to read to the children. Libraries can make a wonderful array of attractive, interesting books available. Small children are drawn to bright, interesting objects, and that attraction may translate into lasting associations between books and interest and good feelings.

Some libraries are adding board books to the collection. While infants treat them more as toys than as books, they do learn about the books and develop a fondness for them. While infants cannot follow a plot line, they can recognize pictures and begin to learn about the world around them, and the words that describe the world. When a caregiver holds the child and reads or talks about the board book, the child learns about language and reading. This expands the sense of how to “play” with the book.

Most selection tools include guidance for picking out appropriate books for each stage of preschool development. This handbook contains a brief guide for choosing books at different stages with literacy skills in mind. Different features appeal to different children and different stages. Familiar themes and objects, bright simple pictures, clear simple words, and simple plot lines are helpful for the youngest children. Books can be more complex as children get older.

Book choices can also reflect children's pleasure at seeing people like themselves in books. Literacy is a diversity issue in several ways. School achievement, one indication of literacy,

still tends to break along economic and social lines. Diversity in our collections makes the statement that literacy is for everybody. One thing that places some children “at risk” is catching a community or peer group attitude that reading and writing are unnecessary frills, “uncool,” other people’s values, and other people’s words. On the other hand, the attitude that some groups of people aren’t capable of high intellectual or educational achievement also persists in some circles. Cultural, ethnic, social, and life-style diversity reflected in our collections quietly sends the sometimes-counter-cultural message that literacy can be for everybody everywhere. (Diversity in our collections makes other important statements as well.)

Anything that libraries or other organizations can do to simply put books into the hands and homes of children – the earlier the better - helps literacy. Offering books for checkout is still the primary way libraries do this, but libraries also find other ways to put books into the hands of children. Various libraries have tried book giveaways, book boxes that rotate to daycare centers, teacher cards that let a teacher check out quantities of books for a classroom, providing books for other reading programs, and spearheading book drives for schools or daycare centers.

Programming

The move toward programs for babies and toddlers is a good one in terms of literacy. Librarians are not only providing early reading experiences benefiting the children, but also helping parents know how to interact and use books and language with their children.

Librarians can introduce children and parents to word-sound play such as rhymes and alliterations (same sound beginnings) and rhythm games such as finger plays and clapping rhymes. (Rhythm is related to the sense of syllables and the flow of language.) There are many sources for verbal games, poems, and rhymes.

An effective word game for kindergarteners is to teach sound blending as a guessing game. Say “f-aw-l” and have the child guess the word (fall). Then let the child try out a word like “ff-ih-sh” on you. This strengthens the basic skill of sounding out words.

Talk with children in the library and as part of library events. Help parents and caregivers talk with children. Interactive language use is necessary for language development. After the librarian reads the story time book, he or she can go back and invite children to talk about it. Model talking about it, not only asking questions about the story, but also reacting and discussing it simply. Engage older preschoolers in language play such as conversations between puppets, jokes, and telling stories.

Interactive activities such as talking about wordless books, discussing pictures, and talking while playing with toys seem to be effective in building vocabulary and language facility. This elaborates on the language in the book and extends skills. Early on, librarians can describe pictures or ask and answer, “What happened?” When children are a little older, actual discussions of how characters felt, and connections to other books or events in the

children's lives become possible. Librarians model this behavior for parents who come to library programs. While this behavior comes naturally to some parents, others need to be shown how it works. Often library programming primarily reaches parents who already have some grasp of how to help their children develop language and reading skills; they come to the library because they know the importance of what goes on there. The library's literacy challenge is to help parents who don't already know how to practice early literacy activities take advantage of what the library can offer their children. Outreach programs that take ideas and resources and new patterns of interaction to parents at places like Head Start, teen parent sites, or a family literacy program may truly change the literacy future for some children.

Talking about books with older preschoolers may have another school-related benefit. Children must learn the many different uses of language along with the language itself. Language behaviors, such as asking obvious questions about illustrations or telling children to recap what happened in a book, are different from the way language is used in other situations. Children may be unfamiliar with such uses of language, even if they know the words being used. Asking a child to reiterate what a story just said (for example, "What did Peter do?") or asking for information the adult already knows (for example, "What color is that cat?") may not seem sensible to a child who is not familiar with this kind of verbal interaction. There is evidence that one reason some children have trouble in school is they have not learned this particular type of verbal give-and-take. Library programs can offer children practice with this special use of language and prepare them for the way schools use books and other literacy objects. Learning how to manage the verbal interactions in a school setting can help children do well in school, which is where most literacy instruction occurs.

Another way librarians can help children with early literacy is to ask open-ended questions about the books they read. Open-ended questions are queries without a simple yes/no answer. Questions like "Who can tell me about winter?" "What could Max do about...?" "What would happen if ...?" and "What will happen next?" help children develop language, connect with what they read, and talk about the ways the text connects with their lives.

While children are getting the foundation for reading, they are also acquiring the foundation for writing. Programming can include opportunities for children to use crayons and markers, and write their versions of their names and other words. When children understand they can represent a message with marks on paper, they are building basic concepts of print literacy. Children learn about many facets of life by pretending: inviting them to pretend they are literate lays groundwork for the real thing.

Programs for parents and caregivers are also important. Libraries can help adults do the things that give children a good literacy base. If the library pairs with a group like Head Start or a family literacy center, programming may include actually teaching parents and caregivers how to read to children.

So much comes back to this: read to children and encourage everybody in the children's lives to read to them. Read to children in a pleasant, meaningful way while holding the book so they can see it and then talk about what you have read. It not only builds the base for literacy but also helps overall knowledge and intellectual development.

Libraries help give small children experiences that become motivation to expend the effort to learn to read and keep on reading. Libraries help families start early to interest children in books and make words and reading fun. A friendly librarian, wonderful books, and fun with other children help immensely.

The monograph cited is:

Celano, Donna and Neuman, Susan. *The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development, An Evaluation Report*. University of Michigan; Pennsylvania Library Association. February 2001. This monograph is also available at <http://www.statelibrary.state.pa.us/libraries/lib/libraries/Role of Libraries.pdf>. or <http://www.palibraries.org/publications.htm>.

The article cited is:

Birckmayer, Jennifer. "The role of Public Libraries in Emergent and Family Literacy." *Zero to Three*. Volume 21, issue 3. December 2000/January 2001. Page 24. Text of the article is also available at <http://www.zerotothree.org/vol21-3s.pdf>. Links to the article and many other articles about early literacy support are at <http://www.zerotothree.org/sample.html>.

Activity Notes

Sample activities using the book *CLICKETY CLACK*, by Rob and Amy Spence

MATERIALS:

- Assorted miniature vehicles
- 2 cups
- Assorted rhyming pictures or objects
- 6 inch paper plate
- Brad
- 4 inch construction paper circle
- Assorted pictures of vehicles on index cards
- Assorted pictures of animals on index cards
- Assortment of construction paper shapes

ACTIVITIES After Reading the Book:

1) Direct child in place word activity with 2 cups and a miniature train

Example: Put the train *on* the cup; also practice *in*, *under*, *in front*, *in back*, and *between*

2) Rhyming word pictures or objects:

- Pass out one set to children and call out word or hold up picture
- Child with rhyming picture or object stands

3) Sounding out words:

- Attach construction paper circle to back of plate with brad
- Write "ack" on front of plate to right of brad
- Cut hole in paper plate to left of brad
- Write "cl", "b", "s", "r", "p", "st", "bl" on circle so that one letter or blend is visible as wheel is turned

- Help children sound out "ack" words (may add picture cues)
- May write "cl" to left of brad and cut hole to right. Write word base on circle: "ick", "ip", "ack", "ap", etc.

4) Matching and sorting:

- Cut individual train cars out of one border
- Child places individual cars on matching cars
- Child sorts picture cards into sets of vehicles or animals
- Increase difficulty by sorting flying vehicles, water vehicles, farm animals, zoo animals, etc.

5) CRAFT ACTIVITY:

Child uses construction paper shapes to make a train

Example: Rectangle engine, square window, round wheels, etc.

OPTIONAL BOOKS:

- Read *Freight Train* and *See the Yak Yak*

KEEPING IT SIMPLE FOR TODDLERS & TWOS

- ✓ Process is more important than the product. *DOING* is more important than what is made.
- ✓ A 3-5 minute group time is an appropriate expectation, but may still be too long for some.
- ✓ The younger the child, the greater the need for physical activity. For twos and younger, *at least 1/3 of the day* should be spent in gross motor activities.
- ✓ A balance of active and quiet play is needed. 20-30 minutes of physical activity allows a child to release excess energy before a quiet activity begins.
- ✓ Certain activities need to be repeated on a daily basis to provide a sense of time and sequence.
- ✓ Learning is enhanced when adults observe and then verbalize children's actions.
- ✓ Activities should be short, simple, and require little preparation and clean-up time.
- ✓ Activities should provide children with opportunities to play independently and with other children.
- ✓ Books and story time are essential, but need not be group time.

Sample activities using the book *MOUSE PAINT*, by Ellen Stoll Walsh

MATERIALS:

- 2 cups
- Assortment of blocks – 3 or 4 per person
- Plastic bears and mice (assorted colors and sizes)
- Clock
- Stuffed mouse
- Paint palette
- Sheet of white paper
- Blue, yellow, red paint
- 6 Q-tips

ACTIVITIES After Reading the Book:

- 1) **Direct child in preposition/place word activity with 2 cups and a toy mouse**

Example: Put the mouse *on* the cup; also practice *in*, *under*, *in front*, *in back*, *between*, and *middle*

- 2) **Allow child to explore wooden blocks and plastic bears and mice without giving specific instructions**

- 3) **Visual matching:**

- Place 1 block on table; have child match
- Place 2 blocks of different colors have child match; if successful, do 3 blocks

- 4) **Auditory matching:**

- Name 1 color; have child place that color block on table
- Name 2 colors; have child place those blocks; if successful, name 3 colors

5) Recite Hickory Dickory Dock - children act out rhyme

- Repeat/changing prepositions:
"the mouse ran *under* the clock" or "the mouse ran *over* the clock", etc.
- Have children act out each variation of rhyme

6) CRAFT ACTIVITY:

- Adult squirts paints onto palette
- Retells story as demonstrates mixing color combinations on paper using Q-tips
- Encourages child to mix colors and make own "mouse prints"

OPTIONAL BOOKS: *Mouse Mess* and *Mouse Count*

Reproducible Information

Ten good reasons to read to babies

1. Baby associates your voice with warmth, comfort, and security.
2. Reading has a calming effect on a restless baby.
3. Baby is entertained by nursery rhymes and songs.
4. Holding the baby while reading to him/her creates a close, loving bond between parent and baby.
5. Baby makes an association between reading and being held.
6. The pleasure of being held transfers to the desire to be read to.
7. Baby will learn to listen and will grow up ready to read.
8. Baby will begin imitating sounds and words.
9. Baby must hear English (or French or whatever) in order to learn that language.
10. It's fun to read to a baby!

Selecting books for infants

- ✓ Pictures should be large, bold colorful, and uncluttered.
- ✓ Illustrations should show definite contrast between light and dark.
- ✓ Stories should be short.
- ✓ Books with longer stories should be read to baby as his or her attention span increases.
- ✓ Wordless books are useful to parents to make up stories as they “read” the pictures.

Types of books for infants:

- Board books - pages are heavy, sturdy, and laminated; perfect for little hands. The pictures are simple and clear; the books are brightly designed; the stories are simple and short. Babies can chew on sturdy books without causing too much damage. Clean books by wiping with 1/2 cup bleach per gallon of water, window cleaner, or rubbing alcohol.
- Cloth books -- pages are made of heavy-duty cloth. Pages aren't as easily turned as those in board books, but the books are durable -- just toss and wash.
- Soft plastic books -- these are durable and can even go in the bathtub.

Books to share with infants include:

- Books with rhyme, rhythm, and repetition
- Books with pictures of other babies
- Informational books
- Books with textures or touch and feel books
- Concept books
- Folktales
- Books that feature familiar items or events in baby's world
- Books that feature sounds
- Books babies can manipulate, such as lift the flap books or books with holes (12 - 18 months)
- Books of different sizes and shapes (18-30 months)
- Books with “parent appeal”

Choosing Children's Books for Different Ages and Stages

Infants to Toddlers



Look for books that are full of simple, colorful pictures. Children will first want to look at pictures with faces and round objects. Board books with thick pages are made so they fan out, which makes it easier for a baby to grab and turn the pages. Babies will play with books in many ways. Fan a book out in front of a baby on her stomach and encourage her to crawl towards it.

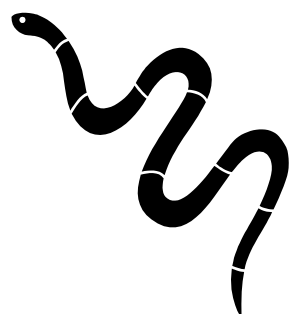
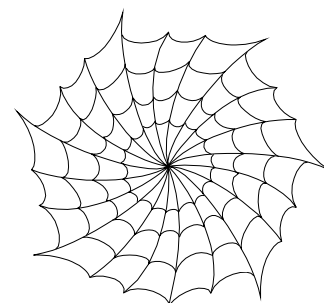
During these early years children learn to name things and to hear rhythms and rhymes. As naming occurs, look for books with more complex pictures that are realistic and show familiar toys and common objects. Books of old, favorite nursery rhymes are fun to read and the rhythms and rhymes greatly increase language skills.

As infants become toddlers, their interests widen, although they still are the center of their world. Books about their favorite subject, such as trains, dinosaurs, or horses, hold their attention after many readings. This repetition helps them grow in their language and means they can listen to longer and longer stories.

Choosing Children's Books for Different Ages and Stages

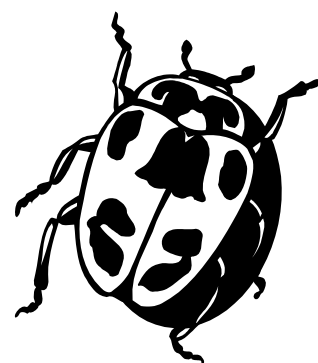
Preschoolers

Stories that are more complex and about unfamiliar things will capture a preschooler's attention. Books that are part of a series build a child's knowledge about books and authors. Chapter books appeal to children because they are more "grown-up." Let children take part in choosing books and help them find books that follow their interests. Non-fiction books about spiders, worms, and insects, for example, may help develop a budding scientist.



Books that play with numbers help develop the concepts of sequencing and sets. Books exploring cause and effect, spatial relationships and pattern completion hold a child's attention with discovery of layers of meaning on repeated readings. Look for books with lots of visual interest; seek and find or seek and match books for this age increase a child's ability to pay attention to detail.

At the same time, books full of fantasy also delight this age child. Their language is fairly comprehensive and discussing detailed drawings will continue to enlarge children's vocabulary. Repeated readings may encourage a child to point to known words and say them aloud. This is also the time when a child will begin to "read" traffic signs and store signs. Look for books that highlight words that are often seen such as "stop" and "exit."



Things that help children read well

- ✓ Their language skills are good for their ages. This includes how well they understand the sounds of language and how the sounds go together.
- ✓ They have heard lots of words and have good vocabularies for their ages.
- ✓ They already know some things about reading when they enter school.
- ✓ They have happy and important experiences associated with reading and writing. They have reasons to like reading and books.
- ✓ They have enough knowledge about the world to help them understand what they read.
- ✓ Their lives are secure enough that their worries do not block their ability to learn. Their lives are calm and happy enough that they have the energy for learning to read and write and for paying attention.
- ✓ These same things help children work hard while they are learning to read. They help children practice reading until they get good at it.

Three things parents can do to help children succeed in school

- ✓ Talk to children about many different things.
- ✓ Read to them while you hold them and love them.
- ✓ Talk to the children about what you read together.

Facts about most children who are good readers for their ages

- ✓ They are read to often and in happy ways.
- ✓ Conversation, books, and written things are part of their daily lives.
- ✓ They do NOT watch too much TV.
- ✓ They see the grownups in their lives reading and writing.
- ✓ They know enough about the world to make sense out of what they read.
- ✓ They know enough about books to understand what they see in books.
- ✓ Their lives are safe enough that they can pay attention and learn.
- ✓ They know that ideas and stories and pictures in books can be interesting.
- ✓ They think and talk about what the words say. They wonder about the stories and ask questions. They react to what they read or what somebody reads to them. They try to figure out what will happen next. They can relate the story in the book to other things.

Parent tips: Make reading to your child fun

- Choose a good time – don't fight the experience from the start. Bedtime works well in many families, but other times also work.
- If the child is just too hyped up at the moment, let it be and come back to it. Forcing the issue won't build a love of reading,
- One reason to read to infants is that they learn how to behave during reading time before they can protest. For older children who won't sit still you may have to start with very brief sessions and work up to longer reading time. Bedtime often works since kids can put off sleeping by listening to a story. It is worth the trouble to ease them into it. It also helps them get ready to sit and pay attention at school.
- Use voices and intonation and even gestures to draw the child in.
- Repeat favorites but introduce variety.
- Talk about the pictures.
- Talk about the books after you read them. What might happen next? Would you do the same thing? Why was this a problem? Why was that a good idea?
- Make favorite stories part of your conversation at other times. "This reminds me of when Peter didn't want his baby sister to have his chair." "Let's try making a snow angel like the kids in that book."
- Imagine new stories to go with the pictures if it's a book without words. Or cover the words and try another story line.
- Find books about what the child is interested in. Books are for more than one purpose, and of course you will introduce your child to classics and learning books, but to get the child interested in books, put up with cartoon characters or every book in the library about trucks.
- Read very simple books with the same enthusiasm you use for real stories; this dignifies them and helps kids accept them in preparation for the time when they will be reading them.
- Keep it pleasant and low pressure – no child (or adult) likes to do wearisome chores and we don't want reading to be a wearisome chore.
- Make reading together a good parent child time. Hold the children close and pay attention to them. Love them.
- Laugh at the silliness, play with the words and ideas, talk about the stories and the ideas they may inspire. Adults are excused for acting silly when they are reading to kids. Nonsense words, rhymes, word plays, and songs are important for the fun of it and because they build the sense of sounds that help children read later.

BOOK BEHAVIORS

INFANTS (Birth - 12 Months):

- Enjoy being held and snuggled and hearing the sound of your voice as you read or describe the pictures
- May chew, mouth, and manipulate books so need sturdy board, cloth, or vinyl books
- Appreciate the sounds of songs, nursery rhymes, and sound effects
- Enjoy large, bright, clear pictures
- Are attracted to pictures of animals and children

TODDLERS AND TWO YEAR OLDS:

- Are delighted by nursery rhymes even if they don't understand all the words
- Enjoy briefly sitting and looking at picture books with one object or idea on a page
- Enjoy pointing to things and/or naming what they see in a book
- Enjoy board books with stiff pages that they can turn
- Older "twos" appreciate "busy" pictures with many different things on a page

BOOK BEHAVIORS

THREE YEAR OLDS:

- Appreciate books with simple text where the story is reinforced by the pictures
- Enjoy repetition - of key lines and phrases, and of favorite stories
- Enjoy rhymes and nonsense words
- Enjoy stories about everyday life and animals
- Can attend to a story for approximately 5 minutes

FOUR YEAR OLDS:

- Begin to recognize environmental print: signs, labels, etc.
- Begin to understand that printed text is what is read, not the pictures
- Relate personal experience to stories and enjoy familiar characters
- Begin to "read" stories to self and others and retell familiar stories
- Can supply words and phrases in predictable and rhyming stories
- Attend to a story, listen well, and study pictures

FIVE YEAR OLDS:

- Can attend to longer, more complex stories
- Are aware of "book knowledge" - we start at the beginning, move left to right, etc.
- Enjoy books which supply information in an area of interest
- May begin to recognize individual letters and words
- May enjoy having their own stories written down

INVEST IN SCHOOL SUCCESS

Balance Sheet

DEPOSIT

Child is read to
under $\frac{1}{2}$ hour per week

Child is read to
 $\frac{1}{2}$ hour per week

Child is read to
 $\frac{1}{2}$ hour per day

Child watches 4 hours of
television per day
(*US average for preschoolers)

RETURN

*By kindergarten entry:

60 hours of literacy
instruction

130 hours of literacy
instruction

900 hours of literacy
instruction

4000 hours of
television viewing

YOUR INVESTMENT NOW PAYS DIVIDENDS *LATER*.

YOUR CHILDREN ARE BANKING ON YOU.

KEY SKILLS FOR THE PRESCHOOL AGE CHILD

Basic Skills Important For School Success

LISTENING SKILLS:

- **DISCRIMINATION:** Ability to hear likenesses and differences between similar sounds
- **MEMORY:** Ability to listen and remember what was heard
- **FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS:** Ability to listen to, understand, and act upon an oral command

VISUAL SKILLS

- **DISCRIMINATION:** Ability to see likenesses and differences between similar objects
- **MEMORY:** Ability to see and remember what was seen

LANGUAGE CONCEPTS

- **CLASSIFYING AND CATEGORIZING:** Identifying groups of objects and how they are related
- **COMPARISONS:** Identifying how objects are alike or different
- **SEQUENCING:** Identifying the order in which events occur

NUMBER CONCEPTS

- **ROTE COUNTING:** Ability to count by memory
- **COUNTING WITH MEANING:** Understanding quantities
- **1:1 CORRESPONDENCE:** Understanding that one number stands for one object
- **COMPARING QUANTITIES:** Understanding that one group has more or fewer objects than another group

MOTOR SKILLS

- **GROSS MOTOR:** Use of large muscles to jump, hop, balance, catch, and throw
- **FINE MOTOR:** Use of small muscles to cut, draw, and copy shapes and letters

PRE-WRITING SKILLS

- 1) Must have the ability to grasp and release an object voluntarily, but do not have to have a mature grasp. (Will first use a full-fisted grip with a crayon or pencil).
- 2) Must move from the "destructive" play stage (when mouths, throws, shakes, or bangs toys in order to learn about them) to "constructive" play (when begins stacking blocks, putting objects together, etc.).
- 3) Must have practice in eye-hand coordination tasks: stacking blocks, playing with shape sorters, etc.
- 4) Must be involved in a variety of sensory/motor experiences:
 - Manipulative toys and puzzles
 - Sand and water play
 - Exploring objects with different textures and shapes
 - Experience with an assortment of markers, chalk, crayons, pens, pencils, paints
 - Writing in finger paints, lotions, pudding, oatmeal, or whipped cream

Children who begin to write letters, numbers, and words have spent years learning the pre-writing skills that prepare them for writing. The age that they go through each stage varies from child to child, but it is the adult's responsibility to provide appropriate experiences for each developmental stage.

Ideas for Literacy Activities*

Birth to Age 1

Play with sounds. Imitate your baby's cooing and babbling. Try to get a "conversation" going by making the sound and then giving your baby a chance to make the sound back. (Be patient. It takes at least eight seconds for a baby to hear a sound and figure out how to imitate it).

Ages 1 to 4

Make up a song using your child's name. For example:

"Jacob, Jacob
Turn around.
Jacob, Jacob
Touch the ground
Jacob, Jacob
Clap your hands.
Jacob, Jacob
Do your dance."

Teach your child to move to the rhythm, acting out the words of the song.

Age 2 and Up

Make up stories together. Tell a story about when you were little. Then ask him to tell you a story about when he was little.

Age 3 and Up

Ask her to "read" to you. This is especially interesting if you have a new book with detailed pictures. You can talk about the first picture. Then ask her to tell you about the next. Prompt her with open-ended questions, such as "What do you think that dog is about to do?"

Age 4 and Up

Keep a reading list. Have your child say something about each book. "It's about a silly monkey." Or "I really liked this book; it's about all kinds of trains." Revisit the reading list and talk about the books you've read.

Age 6 and Up

Help your child start a journal. Take a few minutes each day to write down the important events of the day. Let her spell on her own or help her if she asks.

Age 8 and Up

Develop a parent/child reading club. Ask your librarian or teacher for "fun" reads you and your child can both enjoy.

* Thanks to Sarah Beaman-Jones, LIFT's Literacy Program Developer, for these activities

Helping your children read

- ❑ Talk about many things with your children, even when they are babies. Make conversation a happy time. Use words to talk about what has happened, solve problems, imagine things, tell stories, ask questions, make plans, describe things, and talk on the phone. This builds good language skills for later reading and learning.
- ❑ Give your children a variety of healthy experiences. This builds a base of knowledge so they can understand things they read in books later.
- ❑ Read to your child. Read often and regularly. Enjoy it. This is the single best thing parents can do to help their children read successfully and do well in school.
- ❑ Surround your child with as many reading materials as you can. Regular trips to the library can help you do this. Let children see you read and write as part of your life; this establishes its importance and pleasure.
- ❑ Have a regular family reading time; read aloud to younger children; everyone (including parents) reads silently at the same time for older kids.
- ❑ Keep on reading aloud even when children have begun to read to themselves. Then let them read to you and the rest of the family. Have them read you recipes, poems, mail, ads, and jokes. Remember books on tape for trips or busy times.
- ❑ Talk with your child about the characters and events in stories. Repeat rhymes and sounds. Discuss the pictures. Discuss the story. React. Predict what will happen.
- ❑ Poems, rhymes, songs, word games, word puzzles, and even nonsense words help children learn the letter and sound patterns that help them learn to read.
- ❑ Books help you teach your child about your family's culture, values, interests, and even challenges. There are now children and teens' books about all kinds of people, families, times, and experiences as well as beautiful picture books for all ages that convey many situations and cultures. Try the library for variety. Reading together builds family relationships while it builds success with reading.
- ❑ Let reading be part of nurturing and respecting your child's interests. The library can provide books, magazines, even Web sites on almost anything your child enjoys. Sometimes children will get stuck on one kind of book, but time spent simply reading builds skill for reading. Most children will move on to wider interests later.
- ❑ Libraries and other child-friendly organizations often have programs such as story hours, book clubs, read-ins, or summer reading events that encourage reading.
- ❑ Read for information, for pleasure, for entertainment, for help, for education, to pass the time – but read and keep on reading!

Reading Tips for Families

The *America Reads Challenge: Ready*Set*Read for Families* has these tips for families as their children's first teacher:

- Read with your children at a regular time every day and when they ask you.
- Take toddlers and preschoolers to the library so that they can choose books to read at home.
- Find out about your library's special books and services.
- Create a special place in your home for your children to read and write.
- Keep books and other reading materials where children can reach them. Add new books often.
- Keep writing materials such as washable, nontoxic crayons and markers, paints and brushes, and different kinds of paper where your children can reach them.
- Take books and writing materials for your children with you whenever you leave home, so that they can read or write at the doctor's office, on the bus, and in the car.
- Show your children how you read and write every day to have fun and to get things done.
- Point out to your children the printed words in your home and in the community.
- Encourage your children to do things for themselves when they are ready. Let them feed and dress themselves, and clean up after themselves, even if these tasks take more time and are not done perfectly.

(<http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/RSRkit.html>)

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

"Play is the powerful way children learn their most important tasks – how to play with other children, how to handle other adults, and how to learn about themselves as social people."

T. Berry Brazelton, Pediatrician
Author of *Touchpoints*

- It is the "work" of young children
- It is the framework for social, language, intellectual, and physical development
- It is how children make sense of the world around them

"GOOD" PLAY:

- Provides *teachable moments*: a child learns best when he is doing something he enjoys
- Allows for *hands on activities*: touching, moving, experimenting rather than just watching or listening
- Provides chances for problem solving and practicing new skills and ideas
- Allows the child to use his imagination and be creative

WAYS TO PROMOTE "GOOD" PLAY:

- Provide *open-ended toys and materials* that encourage real play; items that children can explore as they see fit
- Provide play experiences that match a child's abilities

TIPS FOR READING TO CHILDREN

- The essence of the reading experience should be to build a warm bond between adult and child
- Read slowly and with expression
- Arrange a time for reading *every day*
- Expect a lot of questions, especially from very young children
- Remember that listening is a skill which develops gradually over time, and even very active children can learn to attend to and enjoy books
- Actively involve the child in the story--draw attention to details in the pictures, ask questions about what might happen next, etc.
- Repeat best loved stories often
- Include wordless books and encourage the child to help you tell the story
- Include nursery rhymes and poems. They help a child feel the rhythm of language, and learning poems helps them develop auditory memory
- Begin with books with large, clear pictures that directly support the text. Move toward more text and fewer pictures so that the child must visualize more of the action
- Enjoy the experience

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH INFANTS (Birth - 12 Months)

- ◆ Has a developmental need to establish trust
- ◆ Needs immediate and consistent responses to communication attempts
- ◆ Extremely curious, actively explore environment
- ◆ Needs security base
- ◆ Responds to human faces
- ◆ Understands names of familiar people
- ◆ Reaches for and grasp objects
- ◆ Looks for dropped objects
- ◆ Explores objects by mouthing
- ◆ Repeats interesting actions
- ◆ Uses fingers to push buttons and to explore manipulatives
- ◆ Enjoys social games and interaction
- ◆ Babbles and squeals to self and others

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH TODDLERS (12-24 Months)

- ◆ Developmental need to establish independence
- ◆ Drive to be upright and mobile affects all areas
- ◆ Separations may be noisy and painful
- ◆ Clinginess increases
- ◆ Frustration, negativism, and tantrums emerging
- ◆ Have difficulty with transitions
- ◆ Do best with structure and continuity
- ◆ Walk, climb, stoop, and throw
- ◆ Jabber with speech intonation
- ◆ May understand 20 or more words and say 10 or more
- ◆ May begin to combine words
- ◆ Point to some body parts
- ◆ Recognize pictures of familiar people and objects
- ◆ Need opportunities to express appropriate power and control: choices, opportunities to say "no"

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH 2-YEAR-OLDS

- ◆ Recognize themselves as separate individuals
- ◆ Begin to identify preferences ("I like," or "I don't like")
- ◆ Are more assertive and articulate about their feelings; discover "no" and "mine" have power
- ◆ Interest in new social experiences, but may be overwhelmed by a large group setting
- ◆ Begin to anticipate consequences
- ◆ Do best with daily routine that is predictable and consistent
- ◆ Enjoy parallel play, aware of each other's presence but not really interacting
- ◆ Imaginary play is used to interpret new experiences
- ◆ Language becomes more conversational; vocabulary of 40-200 words
- ◆ Label pictures in books and describe what they see
- ◆ Repetition is important
- ◆ Enjoy the humor of language: nonsense words, mispronunciation
- ◆ Have a short and variable attention span
- ◆ Focus on manipulating materials

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH 3-YEAR-OLDS

- ◆ Enjoy praise; show pride in accomplishments
- ◆ Like to help adults with tasks or chores
- ◆ May return to younger behavior (being bossy, acting like a baby, using "no" often)
- ◆ Do best with a regular schedule or routine
- ◆ Tell full name and age
- ◆ Use 3-5 word sentences
- ◆ Follow a 2 or 3 step direction
- ◆ Can describe their own actions and what's happening in a picture
- ◆ Can listen to a story for up to 5 minutes
- ◆ Know their gender
- ◆ Understand such prepositions as under, inside, on, etc.
- ◆ Can sort by color and size and name 2 or more colors
- ◆ Count by rote to 10
- ◆ Understand taking turns
- ◆ Handle scissors; make small snips in paper
- ◆ Hold a pencil or crayon with fingers and thumb
- ◆ Draw a person with a head; arms/legs come out of head

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH 4-YEAR-OLDS

- ◆ Like to brag and show off
- ◆ Love excitement or anything new – books, games, etc.
- ◆ Like to please adults and separate from adults easily
- ◆ Ask and answer questions
- ◆ Follow 3 step directions
- ◆ Show extremes of emotion; may worry or feel anxious
- ◆ Are more socially interactive with other children; are learning to share
- ◆ Can give full name address, or phone number
- ◆ Use new words to see what effect they will have on others; may include "naughty" words for shock value
- ◆ Can make logical predictions
- ◆ Can tell how things are alike and different
- ◆ Identify qualities of objects (rough, smooth, etc.)
- ◆ Recognize common symbols and signs
- ◆ Classify objects according to use
- ◆ Name 4-8 colors and count 3-4 objects
- ◆ Can cut on a line and use thumb-forefinger pencil grip
- ◆ Can draw person with body and legs
- ◆ May copy simple figures and print some letters

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH 5-YEAR-OLDS

- ◆ Are eager to please
- ◆ Love to talk and often ask meanings of new words
- ◆ Sometimes are anxious - may bite nails or pout
- ◆ Are interested in "fair play" and rules
- ◆ Are protective toward younger siblings and/or pets
- ◆ May have special friend or friends
- ◆ Use strong imagination in pretend play
- ◆ Are competitive
- ◆ Tell address and telephone number
- ◆ Speak fluently and usually use correct grammar
- ◆ May memorize a favorite story and act it out
- ◆ Use more logical thinking and problem-solving
- ◆ Sort objects by size, color, and shape
- ◆ Recognize several numerals and letters
- ◆ Can count small quantities and match to a numeral
- ◆ Can understand concept of half versus whole
- ◆ Count to 20 and count out up to 7 objects
- ◆ Hold pencil with a thumb-forefinger grip and print first name



To Promote Early Literacy:

Be a model of literate behavior for your children: write notes, keep a calendar and daily planner, post lists of food and household needs and children's responsibilities, introduce new vocabulary words during routine conversation and book reading, and subscribe to a local newspaper and magazines the entire family will enjoy.

Sing songs, make up silly rhymes, read books, and play with words and sounds every day. Discuss printed text, words, and sounds as “objects” that can be thought about, manipulated, altered, and explored. Help children build and use their ever-growing vocabulary.

Provide children with the tools of literate behavior (pens, pencils, markers, paper, envelopes, a stapler, paperclips, stamps, a dictionary, an atlas, telephone books, magazines, catalogues, newspapers, junk mail) and engage in daily literacy activities with your children (write thank you notes, mail birthday cards, look up phone numbers, find exotic destinations in an atlas, write lists, read books, visit the library).

Notes from the *Missouri Families* e-letter
For further information on Children's Early Literacy, see
<http://missourifamilies.org/features/childcarearticles/childcare3.htm>.

What are children learning when we read to them?

What are we teaching children when we hold them close and read to them, when we make reading and writing a pleasant part of everyday life?

- We are teaching them that they are important to us and we care about them. Researchers now believe reading and learning, like so many other things, are deeply related to relationships.
- When we hold children close and read to them, they are learning to sit still and watch a book. This is a skill best developed early.
- When children sit with us and watch the book we are reading to them, they learn that books open a certain way, that the English code runs from left to right (help them out by tracing the line with your finger as you read), front to back, page to page, one word after another.
- They realize the story is in the letter marks, that marks mean words and they mean the same words each time. They learn all books aren't the same, but they use the same code and system.
- Good readers have heard a lot of words. When we read to children they encounter and understand vocabulary they don't usually hear or meet. They get accustomed to differences in written and spoken language and variations in language.
- They make sense of story and narration. Through words, they enter into something they haven't experienced personally.
- They gain background knowledge vital to reading comprehension as they learn about both books and the world.
- When we hold children close and read to them, they get interested in what is in books and realize books are a source of pleasure.
- They get good feelings about reading; this helps them persevere during the learning process and motivates them to learn to read.
- They realize reading is important to the adults they care about and learn to value it; a value and motivation that helps them in school.
- When the adult reading the book talks about the book, it expands the child's language and interest.
- When the adults reading the books talk with the children about the book and the pictures, the children learn how to use context, which is a skill the child needs to make sense of reading later on.
- They learn that books relate to their lives. Well-chosen books help teach children the values and associations their families hold dear.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS AND READING

A child who is read to on a regular basis is more likely to become a "reader" – a person who not only can read, but one who enjoys reading.

Being read to is the single best indicator of later school success.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CAN:

- Enrich vocabulary
- Enhance comprehension and knowledge
- Support a child through challenging events in life
- Provide a model for articulation of specific sounds
- Help increase attention span and thinking skills

BUILDING BLOCKS OF LITERACY

- Talking, singing, playing, and listening
- Reading aloud daily
- Modeling reading
- Providing a variety of life experiences

SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS, AND 2-YEAR-OLDS

BOOK :

All Fall Down

Clap Hands

Tickle, Tickle

Amy Loves the Rain

The Baby's Book of Babies

Baby's Animal Friends

Farm Animals

Blue Hat, Green Hat

Moo Baa, La La La

Bunny and Me

Cars and Trucks and Things That Go

Come Out, Jessie

Goodnight Moon

I Went Walking

Outside, Inside

Pat the Bunny

Time for Bed

Tom and Pippo (series)

We're Going on a Bear Hunt

Wheels on the Bus

Where's Nicky?

Where's Spot? (series)

Who Says Quack?

AUTHOR :

Helen Oxenbury

Lillian Hoban

Antea Sieveheng

Random House

Sandra Boynton

Adele Aron Greenspan and
Joanie Schwarz

Richard Scarry

Harriett Ziefert and
Mavis Smith

Margaret Wise Brown

Sue Williams

Kathleen Fain

Dorot Kunhardt

Mem Fox

Helen Oxenbury

Michael Kosen and
Helen Oxenbury

Paul O. Zelinsky

Cathryn Fallwell

Eric Hill

(A pudgy book)

SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR 3-YEAR-OLDS

BOOK:

Big Red Barn

*Brown Bear, Brown Bear,
What Do You See?*

Clickety Clack

Come Along Daisy

Dear Zoo

Dinosaur Roar

Dogs Don't Wear Sneakers

Freight Train

Good Night, Gorilla

Have You Seen My Cat?

Head To Toe

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Jamberry

Jump, Frog, Jump

The Lady With The Alligator Purse

The Little Mouse

The Red Ripe Strawberry

The Big Hungry Bear

Mouse Mess

Mouse Paint

AUTHOR:

Margaret Wise

Bill Martin/Eric Carle

Rob and Amy Spence

Jane Simmons

Rod Campbell

Paul & Henrietta
Strickland

Laura Numeroff

Donald Crews

Peggy Rathmann

Eric Carle

Bruce Degen

Peggy Rathmann

Nadine Bernard Westcott

Don & Audrey Wood

Linnea Riley

Ellen Stoll Walsh

SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR 4-YEAR-OLDS

BOOK:

Counting Crocodiles

Each Peach Pear Plum

Greedy Python

Grouchy Ladybug

The Grumpy Morning

Hop, Jump

I Love You With All My Heart

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie
(& other books by this author)

Is Your Mama a Llama?

Leo the Late Bloomer

Miss Spider's Tea Party

My Big Dog

Mouse Count

Over in the Meadow

The Snowy Day

Suddenly

To Market, To Market

Warthogs in the Kitchen

When the Fly Flew In

Where the Wild Things Are

The Wolf's Chicken Stew

AUTHOR:

Judy Sierra

Janet & Allan Ahlberg

Richard Buckley/Eric Carle

Eric Carle

Pamela Duncan Edwards

Ellen Stoll Walsh

Noris Kern

Laura Numeroff

Steven Kellogg

Robert Kraus

David Kirk

Janet Stevens and
Susan Stevens Crummel

Ellen Stoll Walsh

Paul Galdone

Ezra Jack Keats

Colin McNaughton

Anne Miranda

Pamela Duncan Edwards

Lisa Westberg Peters

Maurice Sendak

Keiko Kasza

SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR 5-YEAR-OLDS

BOOK:

Animals Born Alive and Well

Gingerbread Baby

Hedgie's Surprise

Hey, Little Ant

How Animals Hide

The Kissing Hand

Left or Right

Noah's Ark

Red Lace, Yellow Lace

Stellaluna

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble

Verdi

We Are Wolves

When Bluebell Sang

When Dad Cuts Down the Chestnut Tree

AUTHOR:

Ruth Heller

Jan Brett

Phillip and Hannah Hoose

Books for Young Explorers
Nat'l Geographic Society

Audrey Penn

Karl Rehm and Kay Koike

Peter Spier

Mike Casey

Janell Cannon

William Steig

Janell Cannon

Melinda Julietta and
Lucia Guarnotta

Lisa Campbell Ernst

Pam Ayres

Developmental Benchmarks

Skills children typically have at a given age

At three months, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn head toward bright lights • Respond to loud sounds • Grasp objects placed in hand • Recognize breast or bottle • Begin to bat at objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make cooing, babbling sounds • Lift head and chest when lying on tummy • Quiet when spoken to • Follow moving objects with eyes • Smile
At six months, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach for toys and pick them up • Move toys from hand to hand • Help hold bottle • Sit with minimum support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to crawl • Roll over both ways • Turn toward source of normal sound • Recognize familiar faces
At nine months, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit without support • Find toy hidden under cloth • Imitate “bye-bye”, “mama”, clap, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin creeping on hands and knees • Enjoy dumping out and picking up things
At one year, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pull himself/herself to a standing position • Crawl on hands and knees • Wave “bye-bye” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put toys into container • Begin to use a spoon and hold a cup • When asked, point to object he/she knows
At 18 months, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try putting on their own shoes • Feed themselves with a spoon • Like to help • Let you know what they want 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point to things when needed • Walk without help • Pick up a Cheerios® • Build a tower with three blocks
At two years, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to short stories • Turn the pages of a book • Copy another child’s play • Jump 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run • Walk up and down stairs with help • Sometimes use two-word sentences • Often do the opposite of what is asked
At three years, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk well enough to be mostly understood • Use three-word sentences • Tell you who is a girl and who is a boy • Pedal a tricycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kick a ball • Initiate (copy) drawing a straight line • String large objects • Name six body parts
At four years, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions • Play make-believe • Take turns • Dress himself/herself, except for fasteners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put together a 7 to 12 piece puzzle • Draw a face • Balance on one foot • Name several colors
At five years, your child should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play organized games • Follow three-step directions • Cut with scissors • Copy familiar shapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a person with 6 to 8 body parts • Catch a bounced ball • Count to ten • Understand the meaning of many words